

Affection by midnightwriter

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"There were many reasons why Steve kept his distance from Billy Hargrove and he could list a few of them such as a) the guy was an asshole b) the guy was definitely crazy c) he was a shitty brother to Max, to say the least d) he had been shitty to Lucas as well, in fact, to all of his kids - sorry, not his, but his friends, his 13-years-old friends (God! He needed to get out some more) - and e) he had beat the shit out of Steve not so long ago."

Affection

Author's Note:

- For [donamorte](#).

This was written because of R. Dear R, stop feeding me your ships and making me think and write plots for them, thanks. Love ya.

The title's from the song "Affection" by Cigarettes After Sex, which was what I was listening while writing this and ignoring my responsibilities. Feel free to listen to their album while reading.

Also, English isn't my first language and I don't have a beta, so I appreciate if you point mistakes and typos. Hope you enjoy!

There were many reasons why Steve kept his distance from Billy Hargrove and he could list a few of them such as a) the guy was an asshole b) the guy was definitely crazy c) he was a shitty brother to Max, to say the least d) he had been shitty to Lucas as well, in fact, to all of his kids - sorry, not his, but his friends, his 13-years-old friends (God! He needed to get out some more) - and e) he had beat the shit out of Steve not so long ago. Because of all of the above, Steve kept his distance and his eyes on Billy, like a zebra would keep an eye open to survey the lions that were ten feet away drinking water from the same pond.

And he didn't like to dwell on things such as why he compared himself to the zebra in this scenario. It was best not to.

The thing was that by keeping an eye on Billy, he started noticing things that he shouldn't have noticed. Things that made him feel something dangerously close to sympathy for the guy which, in case you skipped the first paragraph, was a massive asshole. He observed how the guy would always sit in the back of the room and wouldn't talk to anybody. Sometimes he would say something arrogant to a teacher he particularly disliked or wink to girls that looked too often

in his direction, but for the most part, he was just quiet, not really there and seeming awfully alone.

Not only seeming, he was actually alone.

Steve observed him during lunch and the guy would always sit by himself. If anyone tried to sit next to him, he gave a mortal look that Steve thought only Eleven could top. He was popular amongst most girls in school, he would parade them around and be loud about it. However, he didn't have a girlfriend. Those girls would come and go as easily as if they had never been there.

The idea of having these many girls willing to be with you might have seemed interesting to Steve a few months or years ago, nowadays he just missed having someone to talk and that would care for him. He missed Nancy. Like, a lot. And seeing her every day didn't make things easier, even if it wasn't her fault, he was hurting. The fact that he still had been attending her house due the D&D games in the basement with the kids didn't help either.

He was digressing.

The point is: He understood that Billy being an asshole didn't help him make friends or maintain relationships. Still, it felt sad. Even more when Steve discovered the motive behind his bruises.

The gossip around the school was that Billy was part of a gang and his bruises were the result of some ritual or a gang fight. Considering how weird Hawking was, that definitely wasn't the craziest theory. Only, Steve had access to Max, who told them - not in so many words - the abuse Billy suffered from his dad, her step-father. Steve asked her if the man touched her in any form and she denied, said he kept all of his anger to Billy and Billy used to return it to her, but hadn't done it since the Bat Incident.

So when Steve decided to sit at the same table as Billy during lunch and made him his lab partner in Chemistry, he didn't go hoping that the asshole would be nice to him or that they would become friends. It was all about his new found mission on Earth: help people.

Until last year he was an extremely narcissist kind of guy, worried

only about himself and his image. Years of being the richest kid in town tended to do that to a person, not that he was excusing himself from some of his bad behavior from the past. However, being around Nancy, influenced by her and away from his old "friends" he managed to grow, to become more mature. He thought that he now was closer to adulthood than ever before. It had its downsides like trying to befriend a guy that punched him only two weeks ago because he wanted to help him out.

This new found goodness was going to get him killed, he knew that.

Billy shot dirt looks on his direction, tried kicking his leg under the lunch table and made some unpleasant comments when they were in the locker room shower. Steve met him with quick answers and kicked him back. He also made sure that Billy knew that staring at him in the shower was fucking creepy.

November was a long, long month for all of the involved. Nancy questioned him to see if he had any head injuries or was coerced in any form or way. December came and Steve was surprised to note that Billy no longer kicked him under the table or gave him dirty looks or stared at him during showers. He even played nicely during P.E., never throwing the first ball at him during dodgeball and not throwing him on the floor during basketball. It was nice.

Maybe, just maybe, Billy wasn't as much of an asshole as everyone thought. Maybe. Possibly. He hoped.

It was the middle of December and Max was sitting next to Billy in his car. Less than two months ago, she would've been terrified of that. The sound of the motor of that vehicle was enough to make her sick. She hated her half-brother in a way she didn't hate many things in life. Then, out of nowhere, he started to act less awfully to her.

At first, he avoided her after the Bat Incident and she always smiled remembering how strong and freighting she could be if she wanted, it made her feel powerful, even if she didn't have Eleven's superpowers or her brother's height.

But in this past couple of weeks, he had been almost nice to her. He let her choose the movie she wanted while their parents were gone to some date night so they could watch it together. And this morning he let her eat the rest of the cereal. All. By. Herself. He always stole the last portion for himself.

Max didn't know what was happening to her half-brother, what sort of spell he was under, but she liked it. She silently wished that things could be like this every day and not just after she threatened to bash his balls using a baseball bat. Even wishing for that, she wasn't ready to hear what he said to her next.

"I'm sorry." He seemed oddly sincere and Max looked at him as if he had grown a second head, which, quite frankly, would be less unexpected than listening to him apologize.

"Are you ok?" She asked in a reflex. The first thing that popped into her mind was *'well, he's probably dying and is apologizing so he can avoid hell. Good luck with that'*.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just-" He breathed deeply. "I'm sorry, ok? I was an asshole to you and I shouldn't be an asshole to people, especially not to... my little sister."

She gaped, taken by surprise by every single word uttered in that sentence. Yep, he was dying. Probably this week.

"Did something happened?" She asked against her better judgment, worried that whatever punch he took this time had actually made brain damage. He looked intensely at her, the wildness and violence of that Billy she knew trying to escape, but he breathed again before speaking.

"Nah. Steve said I should be nicer to people."

"And you heard him? Just like that?"

"He kindly pointed out that acting like that wouldn't make me better than father." His voice was constricted by anger or shame or both.

"He has a point."

Silence followed her statement. Billy was caught in his own thoughts until he dropped her at school and she stared at the car until it was out of sight.

What the fuck had just happened?

She followed to her locker, bumping into Lucas in the process. He smiled brightly at her before noticing the strange look she had on her face.

"Is something wrong?"

"I think Billy is dying."

"What?"

"He was nice to me, Lucas! He gave me cereal and let me choose the movie and he apologized! He said he was sorry for being an asshole. There's no other explanation: He's dying."

"Hmm... That explains why he was sort of nice to me." He muttered in agreement.

"Wait? Was he nice to you? When that happened?"

"Last week when I was at your house. I was in the kitchen, he saw me, asked me what I was doing there, I told him that your mother said we could have sodas while we were studying and he just gave the open cans to me."

The look on his face was one of complete horror, he couldn't believe his own words and he was telling about something that really had happened to him. It had been one of the most surreal moments of his life which was saying a lot considering that he had seen and fought against monsters that lived in another dimension not once, but twice in the past year.

"That's why you were so weird that day."

"Yeah. I thought your crazy brother had poisoned us or something."

"You shouldn't have thrown the soda on my mom's plants, though."

"I thought he was trying to kill us! I have great survival instincts, ask Dustin, ask anyone."

"I believe you." She smiled at him, enamored. "C'mon, we have Math now." She took his hand in hers and forgot all about Billy's shenanigans, too happy to be worried about him and his antics, even if Math's classes sucked.

The real panic came when, on Christmas evening, she had a present from Billy underneath the tree waiting for her. It was a blue Pac-Man T-shirt, the yellow figure occupying most of the shirt and the words "game over" written above it. It was beautiful and she loved it, the only problem was that now she was almost sad that he was dying. Also, she hadn't thought to buy anything for him. Maybe she would be the one to share the last portion of the cereals this time.

Through January, the dynamics between Steve and Billy remained, only there was the addition that now they were labeled as friends by the other people from school. Steve still thought it was weird to suddenly be friends with Billy but stranger things had happened in that high school, and he liked to think he was a good influence on the other boy.

Billy didn't magically become a charming prince or a boy scout helping old ladies cross the street, he still had the annoying smirk, car, and attitude, but the rage wasn't so whopping anymore, it still laid there underneath his skin and the bruises that tainted it. Sometimes, when Billy's father was being particularly nasty to him, he'd run away to Steve's house, where his parents were never home.

They would watch movies or TV, listen to music - this happened so often that now Steve was a Metallica fan, 'Fade To Black' was a favorite these days -, play video games, drink beer and smoke, although no smoking was allowed inside the house anymore. The smell if left in Steve's room almost grounded him for one month.

One of these days, they found Steve's mother collection of Jane Fonda's exercise tapes and they were just drunk enough to try and recreate some of its movements, while also being completely

incapable of standing on their feet.

Steve noticed that Billy was intense about everything he did, regardless of what he was doing. Singing? It was made with passion, screaming and playing air guitar and air drums. Watching movies or TV? It was followed by dozens of commentary about the characters, hating and loving them as if he knew them personally. Drinking? It could never be just one beer, he had to get drunk. That's usually when the dancing started, he wasn't bad at it, it just made Steve feel very awkward about how sensual he made every movement, lustful even.

He never complained or asked him to stop, though, whatever this was he knew Billy needed these moments to put his mind at ease. He wasn't even surprised anymore when the boy made him dance with him, holding his hands and guiding him through a frenzy of senseless movements, it was fun after all, to strip from your conscience for a few songs and just feel good and have fun.

During the first week of February, something very strange happened. No, Dustin hadn't adopted another demodog, Steve and the other kids had explained to him very carefully why it was dangerous to adopt and feed creatures from another dimension months ago. And no, Will hadn't disappeared again to said another dimension. Also no, Eleven hadn't done anything except for using her mind to stop an ice cream truck that skipped Mike's house, but that was months ago too.

What happened was Nancy, sweet and intelligent and brave Nancy, the previous love of his life, walking towards him on a Monday afternoon. Their relationship wasn't the same as before, but Steve was proud of himself for being able to keep his friendship with the girl. Did his heart break a little every time he saw her with Jonathan? Yes, but less and less after every passing day, so he counted that as a positive sign. As you can see, the strange part wasn't Nancy coming to him or smiling at him, was what she said to him.

"So, you're going to Valentine's Prom?"

"Uh. I don't think so. No one asked me out yet." He joked.

"What? Billy didn't ask you?" She sounded rebellious. "Did you guys

had a fight? Or did you break up?"

Steve stared at her for what felt like minutes and probably were minutes since she was snapping her fingers in front of his face and calling his name, asking if he was alright.

"W-What?"

"I asked you if you are alright."

"No, no. Before that. What did you say?" She thought of her words for a second before answering.

"If you guys had broken up. Is that it? Is that what happened? What did Billy do?" She still sounded angry.

"What do you mean by broken up?" He was speaking very slowly, afraid that if he spoke faster than that he would lose himself even more in this conversation.

"When two people that are together decide not to stay together anymore?" Now she just seemed worried about his mental state.

"So, what you're saying is that I, in some moment of my life, was dating Billy?"

Both of them were frowning their foreheads, unable to understand what the other was saying, almost as if they were speaking completely different languages.

"What's going on?" Jonathan approached, standing next to Nancy and opposite to Steve.

"I think Steve just told me that he wasn't dating Billy," Nancy told him. Jonathan's face of disbelief spoke volumes.

"You guys thought I was dating him?" His voice was an octave higher and he would excuse himself from feeling embarrassed about this considering the subject they were discussing. "Me? Him? Dating? Where did this come from?"

"Steve, everyone - literally, everyone! - thinks you're dating." She said

matter-of-factly.

"Everyone?"

"Everyone. Including my mom and dad." The look he made must have been exasperated enough for her to decide to explain further.

"Your car broke last month and Billy picked you and Max up for a whole week. You were at our house, babysitting Mike and his friends while me, mom and dad went to that wedding in December, remember that? You asked mom if you could use the phone after the kids went to bed and you spent half an hour talking to Billy. You, Jonathan and I were going to the movies, mom asked you if you were taking a girl with you, you said 'no, but Billy will be there to keep me company'. Remember that?"

"Oh, god..." It was a signal of his distress that he ran his hand through his hair without minding if it would ruin his hairstyle. "Everyone?" He asked again, almost whispering and Nancy and Jonathan simply nodded, pitying him and his ignorance.

He was so shaken by the news, that he didn't wait for Billy as he usually did, he simply got in his car and drove to the kids' middle school. Sometimes he would give Dustin, Lucas, and Mike a ride, some of those times, one or two of the other kids would join them as well. Will was the only one that very rarely would go with him, considering his mother and brother would always pick him up. Max was used to Billy picking her up, but sometimes Billy would skip school and Steve was in charge to make sure she got home safely.

"Hey, Steve!" Dustin exclaimed happily, almost running towards him, while the other kids simply walked.

"Hey, kid."

The tone of his voice or maybe the fact that the color had drained from his face made Dustin stop three feet away from him.

"Is everything ok, Steve?"

"Yeah, yeah. Just stuff. Stupid, silly stuff."

Dustin eyed him suspiciously, but let it go, trusting Steve to tell him when he felt ready to share. Steve sometimes was absurdly slow to understand and process things for someone of his age.

"Hey, Steve!" Said the choir of pre-teens when they got closer. Mike, Eleven, Max, Lucas and Will seemed happy and fed and there wasn't any blood coming out of Eleven's nose, so he thought that everything was good with them. The world hadn't gone completely mad yet and he still was here and not on the Upside Down.

"Hey, kids."

"We're not kids." Defended Mike.

"Yes, to me you are." Steve showed his tongue, unafraid to look silly around them.

These past three months he had become close to them, even engaging in some of their D&D adventures. Apparently, it was good for their middle schooler's status to be around someone in high school. Surprisingly enough it was also good for Steve's morale at school, he was now 'sweet' to all the girls at his school. Thinking about it, girls hadn't been approaching him in the past months even if they seemed equally attracted to him as before. It was just his fate to be the last to know that he was dating Billy Hargrove, while he wasn't even dating the guy.

Sure, they went to the movies and watched TV together alone at his house and Billy slept at his house sometimes and they would give each other rides and they sometimes walked around the city together and this one time during the New Year's Eve they laid on the roof looking at the stars and talking about the future and drinking and-Shit! He had been dating Billy.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

"Where's Billy?" Max asked looking for her half-brother in the parking lot. "He skipped school again?"

"No. He was there."

"And he didn't come with you?" She had a face that told Steve that

yes, everyone meant everyone. "Did you guys had a fight? Billy did something, didn't he?"

The weight of this abrupt revelation made him hide his face in his hands and crouch. He wished he could disappear and leave no trace behind, in fact, he was wishing for a demodog or anything like it to just come and get him.

"What did he do, Steve?" Dustin asked. All six kids came closer to him, worried.

"Nothing. He did nothing. It's just-" He looked at them from his position. "Do you guys think we're dating?"

"Hmm... You and Billy?" Lucas inquired and Steve nodded.

The kids looked at themselves, each face and every look had a level of confusion that couldn't have been faked. They were silently deciding who would be the one to answer Steve. After a few seconds, all eyes were on Mike, their unspoken leader, also he was their Dungeon Master.

"Yes? I mean, you're always together nowadays and if someone wants to speak to Billy, they send the message to you and if someone wants to talk to you, they just don't because they're afraid Billy will rip their heads off, but still... We just thought you didn't want to announce it, you know, that you had to date in secret because Billy's dad is a dick."

"Huh. No. We weren't dating. We never dated. We're not dating now. Jeez, how things got this far?" He was standing up again.

He was about to say something more when they heard the peculiar sound of a motor that could only belong to Billy's car. They looked and, yes, there he was, in his car, moving to some song and his shirt obnoxiously open, parading his thorax and half of his abdomen.

"Does he know you two aren't dating?" It's all Max was able to say before the car came to a stop next to them.

"You didn't wait for me. What the fuck happened?" From his car, Billy questioned Steve.

"Uh", Steve gaped, he had never been in a bigger loss of words than at this moment.

Honestly, what could he do? What could he say? His brain had lost every functioning capacity at this point.

"Is he ok?"

Billy stepped out of the car and directed the question to the pre-teens, who just looked at each other and then to Steve, without a clue on how to deal with this particular situation. They preferred the Demogorgon than to betray Steve's trust by telling anything to Billy, they were loyal like that. Steve would thank them for that, except that his mouth worked without his permission (enjoying the fact that his brain function wasn't still back on).

"Are we dating?" He blurted.

Billy gave a suspicious look, scrutinizing his mind and soul. He then gave the same look to the kids, but sharper. Eleven had her body tensed and ready to stop - or start - a fight, the other kids took a small step back. Billy hadn't acted like an awful person to them in these past months but it didn't mean that either of them was ready to trust him, even if Steve seemed to. Steve could be a little oblivious sometimes... Like now.

"What do you mean?" His voice was low and screamed danger.

"People. All the people, like every person in this town, think we're dating."

Billy arched an eyebrow to that. Face still looked angry, but that was his default expression, so Steve and the kids didn't actually know what was going through his head.

"Everyone?" He said slowly.

"Everyone but me until twenty minutes ago, apparently," was Steve's lame response.

"So you didn't think we were dating?"

That got Steve so confused that he could hear his brain cells dying inside his head, leaving him to solve that by himself. Damn brain cells! He needed them now more than he did two days ago in his Biology test.

"Were we dating? I mean, were you?" His voice might or might not had been going higher after every word, panicking.

"No." He sounded defensive.

The six kids were following whatever was unfolding between them closely. Eyes moving from one to the other. Max was about to speak twice, but Lucas and Dustin shook their heads, aware that it was best if they didn't intervene. Eleven had a look on his face that she shared with Max, it was a look they had perfected over these past months and meant 'boys are stupid'. Being so new to this world and proper human interaction, it was no surprise that it took her these many years to figure that out.

"Ok. Good. I'm not crazy." Steve spoke mostly to himself.

He exhaled in relief, his shoulders became less tense and the sweating on his forehead was gone. The strained tone of his voice was now under control and he gave an attempting smile to the kids and Billy.

"But we could be..." Billy murmured and Steve knew that was his honest voice, not the 'asshole voice' in which he would mess around and say things just for the sake of irritating Steve and the rest of the world.

"Uh."

Nope. His brain function wasn't recovered. His little cells left for vacation without further notice.

"I think we should let the two talk." Dustin offered and the six of them agreed and moved farther away, hiding behind a car. Further enough to not be seen, but close enough to eavesdrop.

"I mean-" Billy shrugged and Steve was taken by surprise with how vulnerable the boy looked. He was avoiding looking into Steve's eyes, keeping them on the floor or his own hands. Steve could see how

hard we wanted to light a cigarette just by the way his body moved.

Steve thought of other moments like this in the past months: Billy staying silent for long minutes before lighting a cigarette and only then telling him what was the latest act of his father against him; Billy avoiding his eyes when they were standing too close to each other, except for when they were dancing; Billy's shoulders tense and he looking at his hands when there were other people around them in school. He was really oblivious to these things, wasn't he?

"This means you'll stop acting like an asshole forever?" He joked in an attempt to light the mood, gently touching Billy's arm.

"Never." The fire and danger were back in his eyes, but there was also something else there. Something that Steve had seen so many times before but never recognized until now.

He had had someone to talk to and care for him in these past months and didn't even noticed it until his ex-girlfriend, her new boyfriend and a bunch of kids told him so. He felt very, very stupid. He blushed, was it because of his realization or because he was simply feeling stupid he would never know. A smile spread across his face and his heart began to beat faster and Billy's eyes finally met his.

Billy stepped closer, almost gluing their bodies head to toe and he could listen to both heartbeats, it was good to know that this was as nerve-wracking to Billy as it was to him. He put one of his hand on Steve's jaw and the other one on his waist. Billy moved his face closer slowly, trying to keep his eyes open and connected. Steve gave up on waiting to be reached and pressed his lips against Billy's, his right hand pressing the boy's nape and the left one on his shoulder.

The kids started catcalling them, making a large variety of uncomfortable noises - mostly Dustin. Which made Billy take his hand off Steve's hip to give the middle finger to them, while still kissing the boy like someone drinking water after weeks in the desert. Max was quietly rolling her eyes and secretly happy for her asshole of a brother.

When they finally broke apart, Billy had the most truthful and beautiful smile Steve had ever seen on his face. He was blaming that

and his own stupid smile on that breath-taking kiss, being deprived of oxygen for this long didn't help his already damaged brain cells.

"This means you'll be my date for Valentine's?" Billy questioned, voice low and seductive. Or maybe he was just out of breath as well.

"Yeah. I think I can do that."

They smiled at each other like the lovebird teenagers they were. Stopping only when the kids decided that they had seen enough of that show and they needed to get home or their mothers would get worried. Which was parroted by Nancy and Jonathan, who had arrived there minutes ago to pick Mike, Eleven and Will up, and had been watching the whole scene in silence.

They all went home.

Max in Billy's car, annoying him like younger sisters were supposed to do. She sang "Billy and Steve sitting in the tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g!" at least five times before Billy raised the volume on his car to maximum so he couldn't hear her voice.

Lucas and Dustin were singing the same song during the whole trip in Steve's car while making kissing sounds and mocking him. Steve didn't turn the volume of the radio up, happy to joke around and make equally mocking comments to them until he dropped them off.

When alone on his car again, he looked in the rearview mirror with the intention of checking his hair and surprised himself when found a smile that had been there since The Kiss. Oh, yeah, you bet your ass he was capitalizing those letters.

He couldn't wait to learn how things were going to play out after it but he was sure that it would bring big things, big changes, it would be one of those defying moments. Or maybe he was just exaggerating, he was still a teenager after all and they liked the drama. The important thing was that he was happy as he hadn't felt in months and if felt absurd that it was all because of Billy Hargrove. That asshole!

Author's Note:

This show has people with powers and monsters from other dimensions. That's the best part of fantasy/sci-fi, you can make everything become true: I chose to make lgbtphobia non-existent and I just wish I could make that to the real world... But one step at a time. Right?

Also, cigarettes are bad for your health: they're connected to the emergence of many types of cancer (not just lung cancer) and many other diseases such as arterial hypertension. So don't try it at home, kids! Trust me, I'm (half) a doctor.

And thank you for reading, I sincerely hope it was worth your time because I had a lot of fun writing it. Let me know what you thought in the comments and if there are any warnings I should add! =D